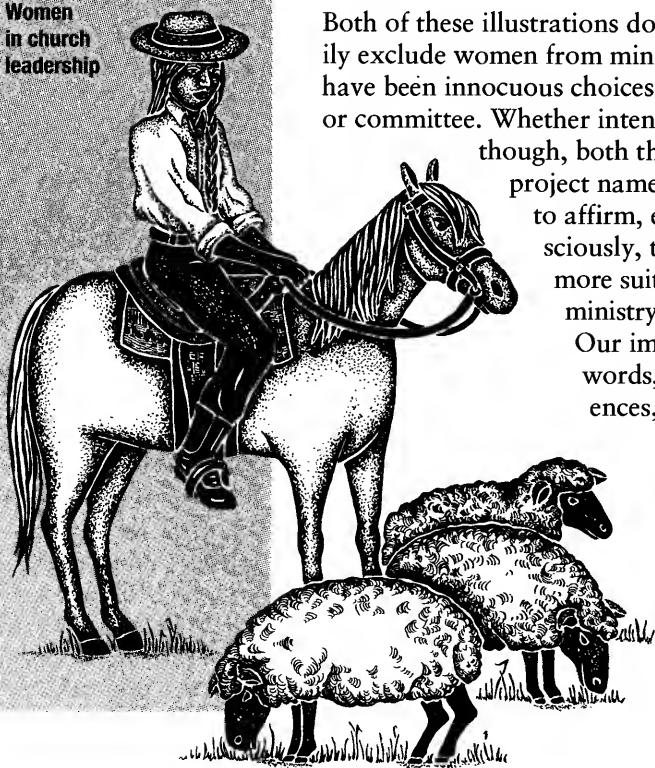


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Women pastors

CO-COMPILER'S COMMENTS

I have a vivid young adult memory of a photo that appeared on the back of the Mennonite Brethren denominational magazine. The caption under the photo asked the question, "Who will be our future pastors?" In the photo itself there were many children, though only one was highlighted by a circle of light—a little boy. A few decades later, in another Mennonite denomination, a project was initiated and carried out to encourage young people in the church to consider pastoral ministry. The study was named for one of our biblical heroes, Samuel.

Both of these illustrations do not necessarily exclude women from ministry and may have been innocuous choices of an editor or committee. Whether intended or not, though, both the photo and project name could serve to affirm, even subconsciously, that men are more suited to pastoral ministry than women. Our images, our words, our experiences, and our

models shape our vision of what should be in a powerful way.

Take the image of a pastor as "the shepherd of the flock." Shepherds have long been portrayed in religious illustrations as either men or boys in rough-hewn fabric tunics or as Jesus the Good Shepherd in white and light blue robes. A shift in this vision happened for me when I visited my cousin as she tended a flock of 2000 sheep under the big sky of Montana. Suddenly, the bathrobed, male shepherd with the crooked staff of my childhood story-book imagination was transformed into a bronzed, young woman in denim and boots atop a horse with rifle in hand.

Is there still a need or is there still room for vision shift in our churches with regard to women in ministry?

Most of the women writing for this issue have experienced a call to pastoral ministry. For each, the journey into ministry was not an obvious direction, supported by everyone around them and the stories have an element of struggle against an expected norm. More than one of these writers mentions the possibility of risk, either in regard to themselves or their church community, in accepting and pursuing a call to ministry.

Beyond personal risk to women's experiences, the church has much to lose if the voices in stories like these are not heard and affirmed. It is not just that the church

Dori Zerbe Cornelsen lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with Rick, and their children Raya and Jonas. She enjoys the interplay between pastoral work with Hope Mennonite Church, gardening, family life, friendships, good tea, reading and travel.

The greatest risk we face in limiting the ministry of women in the church is an incomplete understanding of who God is, in whose image we are all made.

may lose the “feminine side” of ministry potential, which is possibly a restrictive stereotype of what women offer to the whole. In the words of Elizabeth A. Johnson, Catholic feminist theologian, “Enormous diversity [of traits] is reduced to two relatively opposed absolutes of masculine and feminine, and this is imposed on the infinite mystery of God” (*She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992, p. 49). The greatest risk we face in limiting the ministry of women in the church is an incomplete understanding of who God is, in whose image we are all made.

There is appreciation in several of these stories of male colleagues who have encouraged or acted as advocates for the women on this journey. One of the pieces of this issue considers how women and men in pastoral roles might differ in the expression of their ministry. While these differences may be real, it is also true that some women serve differently than other women counterparts. Each gift and ability

brought by individuals to the pastoral role, whether they be women or men, can bring new insight and service to a congregation. It may be that the vision shift to open the door to more women in ministry will only happen when more congregations experience the ministry of gifted women.

The stories in this issue are invitational, calling readers to be encouraged and to seek the heart of God in their own life journeys. None have the tone of self-seeking gain or individual rights but reveal profound love and concern for the church within which the writers serve. In time, I hope we see a church in which all children are welcomed and encouraged to consider how and where they may serve God best in their lives, including the possibility of pastoral ministry. And, perhaps, denominations may want to encourage this pursuit with a Lydia or a Priscilla and Aquila project.

May there be vision to make this so.

—co-compiled by Dori Zerbe Cornelsen

FROM THE editor

After I finished reading the stories in this issue of *Women's Concerns Report*, I am filled with admiration, awe and inspiration. Each of these women have overcome great odds and opposition to their ministry. Their “call” must have

been strong because, in most cases, it seems like it would have been easier to ignore the call than to answer it. Each of their stories is a powerful witness to the importance of women in ministry. When advocating for women in ministry, these stories provide much stronger support than any speech full of statistics and Bible verses ever could.

The struggle of women for ordination and to find positions of leadership within the church is felt across denominational lines. In a recent *Time* magazine article, it is reported that women make up only about 11 percent of the nation's clergy, and women are still usually found in music, teaching, and youth ministries. The article does highlight four women who have managed to earn powerful positions of leadership within their respective denominations. Vashti McKenzie shares a story of how the Sesotho language, a language spoken by some of the members of her district's churches, does not have a feminine for the word “bishop.” She learned this after becoming the first female bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. However, the language difficulty was

The MCC Committees on Women's Concerns believe that all women and men are made in God's image and called to do God's work. We strive to work for the dignity and self-development of Mennonite, Brethren-in-Christ and Mennonite Brethren women, and to encourage wholeness and mutuality in relationships between women and men.

Articles and views presented in *Women's Concerns Report* do not necessarily reflect the views of the Committees on Women's Concerns or Mennonite Central Committee. The articles published should not be perceived as position statements of MCC, MCC U.S. or MCC Canada.

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overcome when her parishioners began to describe her as “the mother who holds the sharp end of the knife” (a biblical reference to the story in which Solomon suggests cutting a baby in half). “They were telling me that I was their real mother, come to care for them . . . When children come to the father, he looks down and doesn’t know what to do. But when they come to the mother, she looks up and sees to their needs,” she explained. This story shows that when people begin to accept women as clergy, they also see the positives of having women as leaders. Just as it is important to celebrate the feminine and masculine qualities of God, it is also important to celebrate our feminine and masculine leaders in the church.

—Patricia J. Haverstick

David Van Biema, “Rising above the Stained-Glass Ceiling,” *Time*, June 28, 2004.

From the desk

- **Staff transitions.** MCC U.S. Women’s Concerns is currently going through a number of staff transitions. Beth Graybill, the former Women’s Concerns Director, completed her term in May 2004. A new director has been hired, Linda Gehman Peachey, and she began work on July 19, 2004. Linda will be working full-time, replacing Beth and myself (Patricia Haverstick, Women’s Concerns Editor)—each of us worked part-time. I will be taking maternity leave beginning early September, and my term with MCC ends in October 2004. Linda will be taking over the responsibilities of editing the *Women’s Concerns Report* when my term ends.
- **Scarves for sale.** At the Gifts of the Red Tent conference, red handcrafted silk scarves were sold. The scarves were made by Madhya Kalikata Shilpangan (MKS), a women’s co-operative from Calcutta, India. MKS partners with Ten Thousand Villages. The logo was created by Teresa Pankratz (from Chicago, Illinois, and the illustrator of the *Women’s Concerns Report*) and the scarf was designed by Mary Lou Weaver Houser (an artist from Lancaster, Pennsylvania). We still have a number of the square scarves (35” x 35”) available. You can purchase the scarf for \$20 (U.S.) plus \$3 (U.S.) shipping. Please contact Linda Gehman Peachey, MCC U.S. Women’s Concerns, at 717-859-1151 or lgp@mccus.org.

One thing thou lackest!

The worship committee was really busy
Within our small country church.
At present we had no pastor,
And they were diligent in their search.

On various Sunday mornings
Guest speakers helped us out;
But laymen needed to take their turn,
Of that there was no doubt.

And so one day they called for me;
Would I also take my turn?
They gave me lots of time to plan,
For I had much to learn.

I studied the scriptures and felt prepared,
Though a wee bit nervous I confess
With my limited education,
And I prayed for God to bless.

Later I heard in the foyer
Encouraging words and critics—both needed.
These were my friends and their advice
Of course I gladly heeded.

One senior lady smiled and said,
“It’s great you help out whenever you can.
Your message was so uplifting,
Now if only you were a man!” ♦

by Linda Riekman

This poem first appeared in *Braiding Hearts and Hands: A Poetry and Dramatic Arts Anthology*, edited by CM Kathleen Hull and Wendy Kroeker, and published by MCC Canada. *Braiding Hearts and Hands* is available to order; please contact your local MCC office to order a copy.



Call: A one-time event, or a vocation?

by Ardith Frey

Ardith Frey recently moved back to Ontario after 20 years away, including 11 years as pastor at Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She has just completed Master of Divinity studies and is currently awaiting placement; enjoying volunteer pursuits, quilting, gardening, and spending time with extended family after many years away. She is married to Marv Frey and they are parents of two sons: one married and living close to Edmonton, Alberta, and one at home in grade eleven.

As the church developed a description of the style of leadership and priorities for the role, I realized that it was close to many of the things I had already been doing informally.

Revisiting the story of being called to pastoral ministry 12 years ago, it is helpful for me to see how this call fits in the broader context of God's invitation to a variety of forms of ministry over a lifetime. It is especially important in my current time of transition: I said goodbye one year ago to the congregation in Winnipeg where I pastored for 11 years, moved back to Ontario to complete Master of Divinity studies, and am now wondering about future calling. I find myself needing to revisit my call like the disciples in John 21. They go back to the lakeshore, where they first experienced their call to discipleship, to meet a resurrected Jesus who equips them to continue to follow him under changed circumstances.

In our small southern Ontario Mennonite congregation, 50 years ago, I mostly accepted leadership roles in family and church that were prescribed along gender

lines. As a teenager, I was encouraged to accept certain responsibilities in the church and, while I did question some aspects of faith and church during these years, I didn't push against boundaries very hard. After high school, I trained to be a preschool teacher.

I first experienced a shock to my orderly world of prescribed roles when the first female pastor in our church's conference came to speak at our church during my college years. Never having considered this possibility before, I delved into my first serious theological reading on the subject of women in ministry. As I read books recommended to me by a friend, I realized that the Bible was not as clear on the questions of gender roles as I had assumed, and that social customs affect our biblical interpretation and practice.

Several years after college and marriage, I left with my husband for a term of service with MCC in Africa. We felt a call to voluntary service as a vocation and, after three years back in Ontario, accepted two additional MCC terms in African program leadership that we shared as co-country representatives. Following this, we were invited to take a shared position with MCC Canada in Winnipeg. We moved there with our two children and found a church home at the Aberdeen Evangelical Mennonite Church. It didn't take long to get immersed in church life in this small congregation.

After several years of job sharing with my husband, I decided to leave MCC and pursue theological studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College. I wanted to reflect on questions from past experiences overseas, and open myself to new opportunities on the horizon, though I didn't have a clear sense of direction.

That same year, I was more deeply drawn into the life of our church. We were without a pastor and were in some turmoil due to disagreements about leadership. There



was a time of discernment, which moved into a nomination process for new pastoral leadership, and I was quite surprised when I was approached to consider letting my name stand. My first response was a bit like Sarah's—to laugh in disbelief—but the questions would not go away. As the church developed a description of the style of leadership and priorities for the role, I realized that it was close to many of the things I had already been doing informally.

After weeks of soul searching and prayer and discussion with trusted friends, I agreed to let my name stand and let the process unfold. One of the major hurdles to overcome was that the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) was formally not open to women in leadership and there was a possibility that the fragile peace of the congregation would be upset by this process. Following a series of congregational meetings that worked through the issues of leadership with sensitivity and real respect, an invitation with broad agreement came to me. Thus, "it seemed good to the Spirit and to us" that God was at work in this process. This was important because I was not at all confident about assuming the role.

There were roadblocks along the way but God provided a way through and around these. Inside the congregation, I received much encouragement and nurture as I learned the role of being a pastor. This congregation had called pastors from within for close to 30 years and also relied on the gifts of all members. In the larger church, I had to live with a high profile of being the first female pastor in the EMC, although several more were appointed over the next few years. Friendships and support began to emerge within the regional EMC pastors' group to the extent that they sponsored a recommendation to the conference to have me licensed to perform marriages (a matter of discussion between our congregation and conference for over five years). For the most part, we enjoyed positive relationships and I was informally accepted as Aberdeen's pastor, even if there were official policy questions to be worked out.

As I review this story, I am grateful for how previous experiences in ministry prepared me for my congregational role, and

Pastor shortage?

Editor's note: The following was written by Diane Zaerr Brenneman, Mennonite Church USA denominational minister. As such, it is specifically a commentary on Mennonite Church USA. However, her commentary could also be applied to the Brethren in Christ denomination as well as other Mennonite denominations in both Canada and the United States.

Mennonite Church USA continues to need more qualified pastors than are available. What are we missing? Is God doing something that we're not seeing? Or are we not participating in what God is doing?

Yes, to both questions, I think.

These days, we missional-minded folks focus our attention on discerning first what God is up to and, second, how followers of Jesus can get into the flow of the Holy Spirit's movement. One big piece of God's work on Earth that we're missing is this: God has given, and continues to give, gifts of leadership to women in the church. Yet only 16 percent of pastors in Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA are women. If God gives gifts regardless of gender, shouldn't that figure be at least 50 percent?

I fully understand the biblical basis of our forebearers that taught women should not be pastors. But God calls us to ongoing study and reflection on God's word and listening for God's voice of discernment. The majority of Mennonites today believe God gives leadership gifts to women, as stated in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1996). But, instead of acting as God does, and folding ourselves into the activity of God, we listen to the voices of a few that want to keep women's gifts under the table. We won't take the risk that some in our pews will not be happy with the way God is leading. We should expect this, actually; there were those who weren't happy with Jesus' revolutionary teachings, either.

Advocating for hiring a woman as a pastor is not the search committee's job alone. These people are volunteers who rightly feel a lot of responsibility to find and act on the consensus of the congregation. Before we ever need a pastor, all of us in congregations need to be studying the scriptures about women in leadership, teaching our young people and ourselves what we believe about God's gifts, and developing a culture of calling young people—both women and men—to consider pastoral ministry.

It remains true that it can take longer for women to match with a congregation than it takes for men. But I am encouraged that women continue to take that risk. Currently, 19 percent of the pastoral candidates available for service through the denominational calling system are women. These women know it will be harder to find a place to serve and it will take longer for them than for their male counterparts. And yet, praise God, they take that risk and offer themselves up to God and Christ's church. God help us all to be so courageous for the good of the gospel.

—Diane Zaerr Brenneman, Mennonite Church USA denominational minister,
Congregational and Ministerial Leadership Team

how indebted I am to community in discerning God's call. While I was tentative in accepting the call to congregational ministry initially, a deep sense of vocation developed over the eleven years. These are faith-affirming reminders as I await further direction in ministry. ♦

As I review this story, I am grateful for how previous experiences in ministry prepared me for my congregational role, and how indebted I am to community in discerning God's call.

A broken vessel restored to serve

by Seferina Garcia DeLeón

Seferina Garcia DeLeón lives in Goshen, Indiana, and attends Iglesia Del Buen Pastor where she is on the pastoral team. She enjoys working in her flower garden and doing other yard work. She also enjoys visiting and listening to people's stories, and cooking for her family and friends. She enjoys reading different kinds of material, in addition to the Word of God, where she can learn a better way to serve the Lord. She loves to sing and journal about her experiences in her life's journey. She has three married adult children and three grandchildren whom she loves very much.



One day, as I prepared songs for the conference, something wonderful happened to me. I started singing in a language that was not Spanish or English, but a heavenly language. My spirit felt full of joy and lightness.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13).

As I look back to where the Lord has brought me from, I can say, "Thank you Lord for a life full of confidence and assurance that God by His grace is sufficient for me." I can now say that I love the Lord with all my heart, soul and mind. He is my source of being. He is my best friend and husband. He walks with me. He speaks to me. He teaches me. He helps me, and holds me close to Him. I have learned to know Jesus in a very personal, intimate way through my experiences.

I am the oldest of six children born and raised in South Texas, the daughter of a farm laborer and homemaker. I learned at an early age to care for my siblings while my parents worked. This skill of caring for others has been present throughout all aspects of my life.

I serve God by showing His love to everyone I meet. My responsibilities as pastor include overseeing the women's group, pastoral care, pastoral counseling, visitation, intercessory prayer, leading worship and preaching. Other responsibilities include workshops and seminars for our church and others.

The Lord has given me the privilege to serve as the coordinator of the National Hispanic Mennonite Women's Conference (CFHM) for the United States and Canada. We are currently planning a conference to be held June 2005 in Dallas, Texas. I have worked with this women's group for 30 years in different leadership roles, both locally and nationally. I love working with women's groups, because I enjoy encouraging women to become confident in themselves and believe that they can serve God as women. I enjoy working as a bilingual Spirit-filled resource who ministers in word and song, and ministers in the areas of worship and praise, intercessory prayer, inner healing, Spirit-filled life, victorious Christian walk, fruits of the Spirit, faith, forgiveness, self-esteem and other topics.

Music has always been a part of my life. While growing up as migrant workers,

my family would sing and harmonize in the fields in order to help the time pass. I grew up Catholic, but began attending and became a member at the Mennonite church in Mathis, Texas, when I was 15. My pastor recognized my musical gifts and asked me to be the song leader. This is where my ministry started; I did not realize until later that this was a special gift the Lord would use to minister to His people.

In the 1970s, I had a wonderful opportunity to lead singing at the Mennonite World Conference in Wichita, Kansas. I had always used other person's songs so I asked the Lord to give me original songs to sing at this conference. One day, as I prepared songs for the conference, something wonderful happened to me. I started singing in a language that was not Spanish or English, but a heavenly language. My spirit felt full of joy and lightness. I felt this awesome experience was the baptism of the Holy Spirit flowing within me. I then started singing in Spanish, and the Lord inspired me to write three songs, "Quien es Este Rey de Reyes?" (Who is This King of Kings?); "O Mi Señor" (Oh My Lord); and "Life Within." These songs confirmed that God is attentive to me and my ministry. Since then, the Lord has given me 23 other songs in English and in Spanish. Someday I hope to record these songs. I am also writing four books of my life experiences; they will all be bilingual.

During my life, I have experienced very difficult trials and devastations of the type where all a person wants is to make the pain stop, no matter what. During this time, it is easy to forget that there is someone that cares. I felt rejected and isolated from everyone; I felt unworthy, empty, a failure, and without hope and love. I also felt very guilty and ugly. I was selfish, only thinking about my hurt and pain, and I did not realize how this affected the rest of my family.

My husband and I divorced when I was 39; we would have been married 20 years at the end of that year. I tried everything I could to prevent the breakup of the home, but I couldn't do it alone. He wanted out.

He told me he didn't love me and didn't want to hurt me anymore . . . this experience was very difficult to bear. When he left, it was as if someone had died . . . the children and I cried. But then the Lord came and comforted us . . .

I was left to care for my three adolescent children. I had no family around, only the church family, but they stayed away because they did not know how to handle a divorce. However, I did feel their prayers. I felt destroyed inside. I felt like a jar that is thrown and shatters in many pieces. Through much prayer and constant trust in God to help me come out of this emotional trauma, the Lord held me close. I was not able to pray; all I could do was say, "Help me Lord," and He was, and still is, my helper and my guide.

I entered a deep stage of depression where I did not know who I was. I did not know my name and all I did was cry. I enrolled myself into counseling because I did not know what was going to happen to me. I visioned myself in the mental hospital wearing a white gown, and I said, "No, I will not let this destroy me. I will not leave my children orphans. I will trust my God to help me through, and the professionals to help me understand why I am feeling the way I am." Then I contacted my spiritual mentors to keep me in prayer through my healing process.

This healing took a very long time. I was in mourning for three years. I felt as if there was a dark cloud over me everywhere I went. I couldn't smile or sing anymore. When I prayed, I saw people laying hands on me. I shared this with my spiritual advisor, and she told me to consider having a deliverance done over me. After this was completed, I felt new strength in the Lord. I started singing in the Spirit in gratitude for what God had done for me through His son Jesus. Praise God!

After this cleansing in my life, I started to see more visions and revelations when I prayed. The Lord moved me towards a different level in my spiritual walk with Him. It was during this journey that I learned to trust and believe Him to mold me and guide my every thought to be His thoughts. I would not, and still do not, make any decision without checking with Him first.

The Lord has given me lots of love for everyone. I have a burden for shattered persons and want to be an encouragement for them. It doesn't matter who they are—they all need healing from feeling unworthy and unloved. I want to share with them what Jesus has done for me; he can do this for them too. We need to believe and he will do it according to his purpose for our lives. ♦

I have a burden for shattered persons and want to be an encouragement for them. It doesn't matter who they are—they all need healing from feeling unworthy and unloved.

The promise

Permit me to take you into the inner chamber of Psalm 71 through my personal journal. This psalm became a sanctuary; a place of safety, hope and rest during the months prior to receiving confirmation of a call to ministry and after acceptance into seminary. During this time, I was struggling with how I would ever make it on my own with three children. Many times I doubted and even questioned the call God had placed on my life to one day minister to women. Then God's still small voice would speak to my heart.

In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion . . . Remind me again and again, Lord, that confusion

is not from You (1 Corinthians 14:33). I trust You to work out the details (financial needs, childcare, a reliable vehicle).

Deliver me . . . cause me to escape . . . You know how my mind works, imagining all the things that could go wrong; so help me to escape into the safety and shelter of Your arms.

Be Thou my strong habitation. I am a woman with little courage; cause me to seek Your refuge when I need to be reminded that Thou art my rock and my fortress.

For Thou art my hope . . . Thou art my trust . . . When I was in a hopeless state,

by Karen Beach

Karen Beach lives in Ridgeway, in the Niagara region of Ontario, and is a student at Tyndale University and Seminary in Toronto in the Master of Divinity program. She is also a chaplain in a multicultural long-term care facility and a single mother of three sons; 22, 18 and 11. Karen is a member of Sherkston Brethren In Christ Church, Sherkston, Ontario.

**For Thou art my hope . . .
Thou art my trust . . . When I
was in a hopeless state, You
brought “stretcher bearers”
into my life who believed in
me and trusted me.**

You brought “stretcher bearers” into my life who believed in me and trusted me. *By Thee I have been holden up from the womb . . .* My life has been spared many times when death seemed imminent; You knew my children needed me.

I am as a wonder unto many . . . not because of anything I have done, but because of what You have done on my behalf.

Cast me not off in the time of old age . . . In many ways it seems as if I am just beginning my life at 42, yet I am afraid that entering post-secondary studies at my age will be difficult . . . *forsake me not when my strength faileth . . .* Show me how to prioritize between children, work, school and friends; equip me, help me to process and retain knowledge from my studies.

For mine enemies speak against me, they that lay wait for my soul take counsel together . . . Give me wisdom in my dealings with “friends” who claim to have my best interests at heart . . . saying “who does she think she is” . . . “I hear she’s unstable and not credible.” And to this You say, “True friends do not speak about each other this way. You need new friends who will support and walk alongside you; Watch! for I will bring new friends into your life.”

O God! *be not far from me: O my God, make haste for my help!* Hold me up, Lord! I am sinking because I doubt myself—all the “what ifs” are depleting

my strength. I am second-guessing Your call on my life.

Let them be confounded and consumed . . . and dishonor those that seek my hurt. You will vindicate me, O Lord, and all the thoughtless words that have been intended to harm me, You will make good because You love me and I am Your child.

I know not the numbers thereof . . . I will speak for You as You ask and I will give testimony to Your grace, mercy and healing in my life for I do not know how many lives will be reached for You because of my testimony.

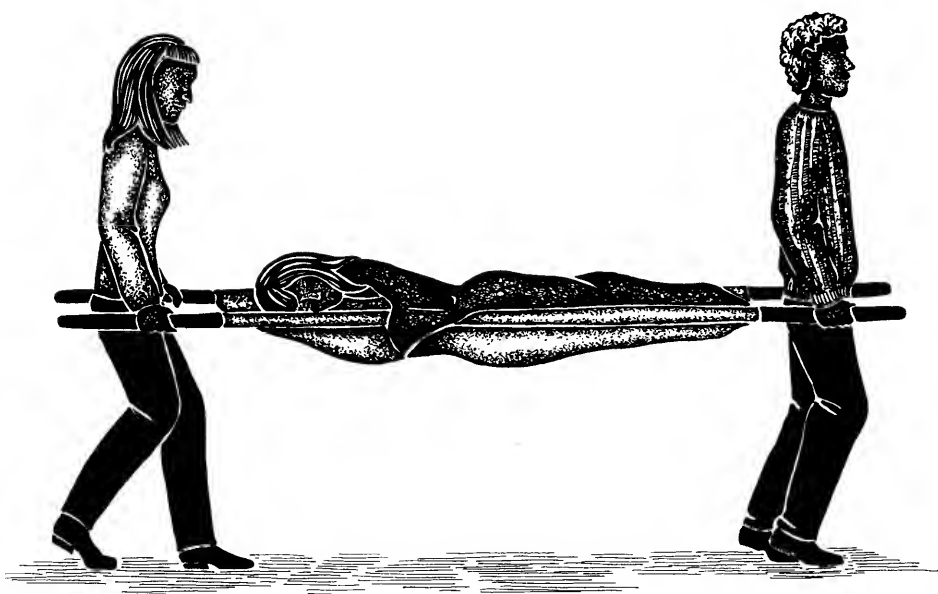
I will go in the strength of the Lord God! I will go where You lead and when I can’t see my way clear, I will wait for Your leading

. . . *when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not; until I have showed Thy strength unto this generation and Thy power to every one that is to come.* I will serve You faithfully—not perfectly, but faithfully—and with Your help be an example to my children, to their children, and to other young women, and women with children.

Thou, which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again . . . and again from the depths of the earth. Even in times of disobedience and faithlessness, You heard my cry for help and did not remove Your Spirit from me.

My tongue also shall talk . . . for they are confounded, for they are brought unto shame that seek my hurt. Release insight, truth and discernment into my speech with others that they may know You are a Holy and a merciful God.

The journey into ministry is not easy for anyone—especially not for women. I have depended on people to support and walk alongside me, who pray with and for me. It has also been important for me to be accountable to a spiritually mature mentor. This is a journey that I could not have attempted on my own! I hope that these reflections can help other women who might be seeking to confirm God’s call to ministry. ♦



Wiggle room

I vividly remember sitting in the pew beside my dad one hot summer Sunday evening during a prayer meeting that was doomed to go on until the rapture. I was four years old—my socks were sticky and my shoes were much too tight. Suddenly I realized there was no room in my shoes to wiggle my toes. My feet were all crawly and constricted. Panic shot through me.

I said nothing. There would be consequences for speaking during the prayers. So what were my options? I knew that my mother (seated across the aisle on the women's side) would die of humiliation if I took off my shoes. I knew there was no point in asking to leave the service and I also knew the consequences of creating a ruckus of any kind. Trust me, I didn't want to go there!

Slowly, an idea began to emerge—risky but possible. I ever so casually lifted one foot up beside me on the bench, slipped it partially under my skirt, and loosened my shoe strap buckle by one notch. I looked up. My dad, who was too busy listening, hadn't noticed. I resumed my undercover operation. I cautiously slipped my heel out of that shoe, just far enough to give my toes wiggle room. The strap kept the shoe from falling off my little foot which dangled quite a distance from the floor. It worked! After a few moments of savoring the delights of unconstricted wiggle and a quick shoulder check, I set the other five toes free as well. It was amazing! I had saved myself, at least for the moment, without causing anyone offense and without getting into trouble. When we stood up for the final song, my feet naturally slipped all the way back into my shoes and no one ever knew.

It's now 45 years later, I am master of my own footwear and no longer need to deal with pinching buckles, straps, or legs that can't reach the floor. However, as I and many of my faith sisters in the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches remain restricted from ministry in the senior pastorate, my wiggle room memory resonates with clear parallels.

For women with pastoral gifts, their journey in our church is likely to be one of isolation. People in leadership that should care most are oblivious. If women speak up, they are shushed or worse. Most women truly don't want to attract attention or cause humiliation but at the same time their whole being is crying out for release (God-given gifts have a tendency *not* to lie idle). Without relief from restriction, women can be pressured to find another way into the freedom of ministry. This means either causing a ruckus or finding a way to release their gifts “undercover,” disguised and presented in a way that is acceptable and that causes minimal friction. This may offer temporary relief but it is not a long-term solution.

Unfortunately, not only the women who have pastoral and leadership gifts are squeezed out by this restraint; but the entire faith community limits its ministry potential and may place itself at risk. These are several areas of loss we may experience if we continue to suppress gifted women:

1. We compromise the good news of the New Testament. The primary message of Jesus, Paul, and of the text in general is that all people are valued in the eyes of God and all are called into ministry according to their gifts—divisions are gone. When we choose which groups to affirm and which to ignore, we tamper significantly with that message.
2. When we dismiss the perspective of one gender over another in ministry, we lose half of our potential insight and experience through the different perspectives that men and women offer.
3. If the community devalues or discredits women with pastoral gifts, all women receive the inherent message that they are not valued or worthy.
4. If leadership skills and pastoral gifts of women are not affirmed, we risk losing their skills to the business world, other denominations or to care organizations that value what they offer.
5. We will not be able to fill all of our pastoral positions if we do not make a con-

by Connie Epp

Connie Braun Epp feels privileged and blessed to serve on the pastoral team at the River East Mennonite Brethren Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba (Manitoba is the only provincial conference of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to recommend the affirmation of women and men in all areas of ministry). She is married to Ken and they have two grown children, Jeremy and Karly. They welcomed the arrival of a new daughter last summer when Jeremy married Joelle LaRue. Connie is currently working at completing her Master of Divinity degree. Her other degrees are in drama and theology. She confesses addictions to learning, people, laughter, writing, thinking, and mining the biblical text for gold (the order varies from day to day). She is 49 and proud of it! Despite the recent onset of perimenopause, she loves life and feels abundantly blessed.

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By recognizing and respecting the gifts women bring to the church alongside men, the church could have the potential for leadership in forging new relationships of equality.

- nection between our current shortage of pastors and the exclusion of gifted women from pastoral ministry.
6. We diminish our witness of light to the world by not confronting gender prejudice in our church. By recognizing and respecting the gifts women bring to the church alongside men, the church could have the potential for leadership in forging new relationships of equality.

And so I ask myself, "What are the hopes and dreams of little girls with wiggly toes who sit in our church pews today?" Will they be freed to free others, bringing the good news to all? Will they be welcomed to speak the message of hope and grace from the pulpit as well as the pew? Will they be able to minister from their experience, from their hearts, from God working in

and through them? Will they be validated by their communities and blessed by their congregations and their conferences? And will we all have the courage to support them? My prayer continues to be that the answers to these questions will be yes. ♦



Women and men: different pastoral styles?

by Beth Graybill

Beth Graybill is the former MCC U.S. Women's Concerns Director. She lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with her husband and 6-year-old son. She is currently teaching a course at a local university, and is working hard to finish her dissertation. She is a member of Community Mennonite Church of Lancaster.

Thinking about to what extent women pastors may share a distinct female pastoral style is a challenge. While I will suggest some gender distinctives below, we do well to remember that gender is a negotiation with cultural expectations, and individual male and female pastors will always complicate any simple assumptions we try to make about pastoral style.

Not long ago, in preparation for a pastor's workshop on gender and ministry, I spent some weeks researching and interviewing Mennonite women pastors. All five women that I interviewed saw their pastoral style as different from the male ministers under whom they grew up. While this is no doubt true, it is also true that the role of the pastorate is far different today than it was 20 years ago, with more emphasis for both sexes on collegiality, shared decision-making, and pastoral care. Said Pat, * "I

*Names have been changed.

had a real reluctance to the traditional male model of ministry: declarative, authoritative. I had to ask myself; was there another way of doing it?" Lou, another pastor, describes her role as "functioning as a midwife in facilitating and encouraging others to engage in the hard work of giving birth or allowing new life to take shape."

The pastors also view their preaching style as distinct. Some literature suggests that women ministers may draw more on story, and be more narrative in their preaching style than men, although as one Mennonite woman notes, "That's changing as seminary classes are moving away from thinking that theory is going to reach people." Gail said, "I preach more from my own experience than other male pastors that I know. I deliberately name and own my biases and perspectives, which are present for all of us, even when we are doing biblical exegesis."

For Dee, “A sermon is a work of art, which can be costly to me in terms of time and energy.” By contrast, she notes, for her male colleague, a sermon is just a sermon, more easily contained within the time available to prepare. But she believes that their complementary styles are useful because they speak to different members of the congregation.

Because Mennonite women are socialized differently than Mennonite men, women pastors may bring particular strengths in certain areas. For example, relationships. Joy said, “I will throw all kinds of special programs and church projects to the wind if it is interfering with relationships; if those aren’t working, the rest doesn’t matter.”

Dee commented that her male colleague tends to see things much more in black-and-white; by contrast, she sees things more in situational or relational context.

But our socialization as Mennonite women may leave those who pastor with particular struggles. One woman pastor I interviewed noted that male pastors may find it easier to say something hard to a person, to let go of the “seduction of caring, which can become obsessive;” this is a skill she is trying to cultivate. One woman pastor described herself as needing to learn to be more assertive, while another needed to learn not to defer to male authority.

While being a woman may or may not make a difference in one’s pastoral style, it does effect the expectations that many members of a congregation have for their pastor, especially in the area of pastoral care. Said Pat, “They think, ‘If I have a woman pastor she should be able to read my mind, like my mother did.’ I want to be available and caring, but I can’t go to the extreme that some people want.”

Congregational expectations about child care also impact women ministers. In the study, *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*, researchers found that although fewer female pastors had responsibilities with children than did male pastors (more women than men in the pastorate are single and childless), their parishioners were more concerned about it. This may be because, whatever the actual division of domestic labor in a clergy household, childcare is still perceived as women’s

work, and thus the responsibility of the woman pastor on top of her church duties.

Another dynamic is the fact that most pastors’ husbands are working full time in another profession, while most pastors’ wives are not. Thus, not only do most pastors’ husbands play a less active and less visible role in the life of the congregation than do many pastors’ wives, their full-time employment may limit their contributions to domestic duties at home. As one woman pastor compared herself to her male colleague, “At least he has a hot meal waiting when he goes home from work. If I want it, I have to cook it.”

In fact, while seminary data from Mennonite seminaries in both Elkhart, Indiana, and Harrisonburg, Virginia, show at least 50 percent women enrolled, women seminarians are more likely to participate in distance-learning and attend part-time over a number of years. Data from the Ministerial Leadership office of Mennonite Church USA shows that women seminary graduates typically take twice as long to find a placement, and are more likely to work part-time and in assistant or associate pastor roles. It is difficult to determine to what degree this is caused by sexist attitudes toward women in ministry or by the fact that some women are unwilling or unable to relocate or to work full time due to family obligations.

National data on clergy salaries also notes a wage gap of nine percent between male and female pastors’ salaries, even when controlling for variables such as position and experience. *Clergy Women* notes that married women are less likely to be perceived as the primary breadwinner, so churches may feel justified in paying them less. And since few objective criteria for ministry exist, subjective judgments—for example, comparing a clergy woman to traditional male characteristics—come into play.

In a 1992 study commissioned by the Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries, Renee Sauder found that a sense of inner call was key to women pursuing ministry. Unlike many men, who have been shoulder-tapped or mentored by older male pastors, women may need an especially strong inner sense of call to compensate for this relative lack. Their process may also take longer. Dee

Unlike many men, who have been shoulder-tapped or mentored by older male pastors, women may need an especially strong inner sense of call to compensate for this relative lack. Their process may also take longer. Dee said it took her “15 years to say yes to God’s call for my life.”



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In this, it seems, lay congregational leadership can be especially important for women. Said Joy, “My home congregation grew me up into the pastorate” by giving her opportunities to serve as a non-ordained person on the pastoral team. Only after some years in this role was she open to pursuing seminary training.

All of the Mennonite women pastors interviewed spoke of the demoralizing effect of those who question the rightness of women in ministry. Said Dee, “I don’t want to spend my energies fighting that battle. I just want to do ministry.” Literature on changing attitudes toward women in ministry shows consistently that resistance to women pastors is best overcome when persons are actually in contact with an effective female pastoral leader. Sauder’s Mennonite study showed a higher proportion of married co-pastors than is the norm for other denominations, so perhaps this is a way to overcome such resistance.

However, few of the women I interviewed are willing to put themselves in situations where they need to prove their pastoral abilities to negative critics. The women experience this lack of support mostly in church conference relationships. Joy described it well: “My pastoral identity was already established when I moved

here to this conference, so you can’t tell me that women aren’t called to be pastors, or that I’m not. This kind of confidence sustains me. Other women here haven’t had a chance to develop their pastoral identity enough to know that they are OK without the approval of male leaders in the conference.”

While this article has dwelt on particular challenges and strengths that Mennonite women bring to ministry, it is important to emphasize again the variety of experiences that women face. Sally Purvis, writing in the book *Stained Glass Ceiling* rejects the notion of a distinctly female pastoral style. Instead, the women pastors profiled in her book are both feminine and forceful. Their strong, capable ministry and their femininity are a negotiation with the gendered expectations of their parishioners. She argues, “those who embody conventional roles in unconventional combinations . . . [serve to] re-gender those roles,” thus expanding the possibilities for other women pastors (90). ♦

Notes:

Purvis, Sally B. *The Stained Glass Ceiling: Churches and Their Women Pastors*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Brown Zikmund, Barbara, Adair T. Lummis, and Patricia Mei Yin Chang. *Clergy Women: An Uphill Calling*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Help for the journey

by Martha J. Lockwood

Reverend Martha Lockwood is a Brethren in Christ pastor in transition from Calgary, Alberta, to Ontario where she is pursuing ministry opportunities.

One of the blessings of the Christian journey is belonging to a mutually supportive and encouraging family, at least ideally. The voice of support has been conspicuously silent for some women who have answered the call to ministry and others may have had to face active opposition. For me the journey has been relatively smooth and has included the blessing of support from both women and men. I wish to acknowledge a few of the significant men who have encouraged, advised, supported and challenged me as I have entered this traditionally male dominated world.

First, I am indebted to my father who was way ahead of his time. He was born in 1914, grew up in a fairly traditional home, married a traditional woman, but was not bound by traditional ideas. His world changed from riding a horse to school on the Saskatchewan prairie to embracing e-mail and personal computers as a senior. Dad was comfortable with change and embraced the changing roles of women. For him, gender boundaries did not dictate the rules my brother and I were raised with. It was always just assumed that I would go to a university and be whatever I wanted to be. I think Dad always wanted

me to follow in his footsteps as an engineer, but when God's call in my life was confirmed, he was completely supportive.

Second, I think of Dr. Tom Dow. While a theology student at Emmanuel Bible College, I sought to fulfill the required internship experience as a student pastor during summer break. I discussed this possibility with the pastor of my home church. My pastor indicated that while he personally supported me, he did not believe that women should be ordained ministers and could not provide the internship I had requested.

I went back to school discouraged, lacking the necessary internship and made an appointment to talk with the academic dean to consider my options. The dean, Dr. Tom Dow, was a warm, caring, funny and very approachable professor. He listened to my story and shared with me a story that I will never forget. He told me that some people didn't like him because of the way he parted his hair—something he felt he could do nothing about. Likewise, he said, in our conservative theological circles, there would be some people who dismiss me as a pastor simply because I am a woman—something I could do nothing about. All I could do was be sure of my call, allow God to open doors, and not let those opposing me dissuade me.

He then offered me a different kind of internship as his teaching assistant (TA). It did not give me pastoral experience, but gave me a wealth of teaching and administrative experience. I enjoyed my year as Dr. Dow's TA and learned many things—the biggest lesson being that my gifts, abilities, and experience may not always be welcomed but this must never suppress my call.

Third, I am grateful for the Rev. Jim Ernst. On All Saints Day, November 1, 1991, I became part of the staff at Lancaster Brethren in Christ Church, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as Minister of Youth and Young Adults. It was a large church and Jim was the senior pastor. Jim was very supportive, encouraging, challenging, and displayed a great deal of confidence in the ability and integrity of his colleagues. He praised us publicly and gave us accountable autonomy in our respective ministries. Jim was also the father of three children;



two daughters and a son. He understood the real or perceived limitations that women clergy had to face. He did not want the women in his life (particularly his daughters) to have to face those barriers and was willing to be an advocate for women clergy.

One year, at our annual conference meeting that included the usual reports, business, testimonies and prayers, I was disturbed that no women played any kind of up front role—not even a token woman to pray for the noon meal. I shared this observation with Jim and asked if it would be appropriate to write my concerns in a letter to our bishop. While I did not want to run the risk of being branded a “strident feminist,” I did not want to face the same frustration year after year. Instead, Jim offered to write the letter and had me read it before sending it. It was a wonderful letter which affirmed our new bishop and the positive conference we had experienced. Jim proceeded to write that he wished for visible female role models for his daughters, for the bishop's teenage daughter, and for any other young women who might be sensing God's call. The letter communicated encouragement and respect for the bishop along with a call to be deliberately inclusive. Jim's willingness to be such an advocate was important to me in the nine years I stayed at Lancaster BIC Church.

Having given testimony to some of the men who have blessed me in my journey with God in ministry, I pray you too will have help for your journey, whether you are young or old, male or female, single or married, or in any phase of life. ♦

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My experience in ministry

by Magdalena Widjaja

Magdalena Widjaja, originally of Indonesia, is a pastor of the Chinese ministry of the Grace Mennonite Church in Regina, Saskatchewan. Magdalena enjoys playing badminton and plays twice a week with the senior group in her area. She also enjoys plants, cooking, and singing at home.

I was born in Indonesia, a country of 13,000 islands, in a family of eight children. My father was an ancestor worshiper and my mother was a nominal Christian. However, God had done a great thing in my family. After my mother became a Christian, all eight of her children were led to Christ and finally her husband as well. Since then my faith has been rooted and continues to grow in the Lord. I went to church every week when I was young.

When I was 16, at a revival meeting of our church, I felt the call to serve the Lord, especially to evangelize in mainland China. At that time, Indonesia had a bad relationship with China and we were not allowed to go to China. If they found anyone had a connection to China, the Indonesian government would put that person in jail.

I did not know how this calling would become reality. I only believed with my simple faith that one day I would go to China—our God is a great God who doesn't make mistakes. While still in Indonesia, I went to evangelize in China for two months in a few villages in 1981.

God fulfilled His calling in 1993, when I came to Canada to study, by placing me as pastor of the Chinese Ministry at Grace Mennonite Church in Regina. There I have been ministering to scholars, university students, and their visiting parents who come from China.

I am the first in my family and among my relatives to become a pastor. Even though, at first, my father disagreed with my decision to be a pastor, later my parents, brothers and sisters were proud of me. They pray for me daily.

When I ministered in Indonesia, I lived in the rectory. Everything was prepared by the church. I didn't even need to drive because the church had a van and a driver. Being a pastor in Canada, I needed to find a place to stay and everything else I needed. It was one of my difficulties at the beginning of my ministry.

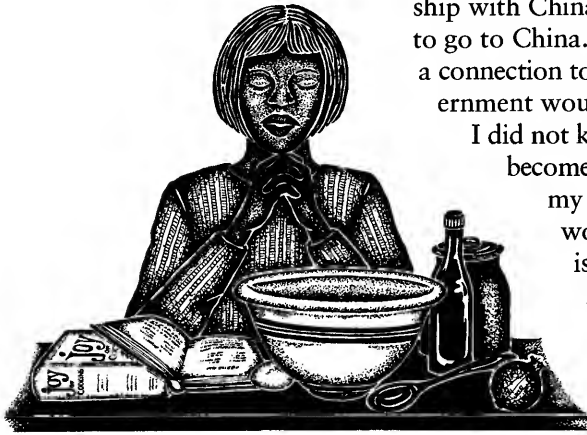
Being a woman pastor in a western country, I have learned many new things. In Indonesia, I hoped and prayed that God would send someone to drive for me whenever I needed but in Regina, my colleague Terry came to me and said, "No, Magdalena, you should learn to drive." It was winter the first time I tried driving alone and, when my wheels slipped around a corner, I drove right back home and told the Lord that I was scared and couldn't drive. Suddenly, the Lord spoke to me, "You said you dedicated your life to me, then why are you scared? If you die because of a car accident, you died for me, isn't it so?" I was awakened by this and trusted God and tried again.

Another difficulty is cooking. This ministry requires me to do a lot of cooking for potlucks and inviting members and non-believers over for meals. When I arrived, I didn't have confidence to cook because I had a maid to cook for me in Indonesia. I prayed each time I cooked and God helped me. Our God is really omnipotent, capable of everything—even teaching me to cook!

I also had to learn how to work with finances in a new culture. When I was hired, I didn't realize that I was required to respond to the financial difficulty of my ministry. It was not my responsibility and I had never talked about money with my congregations when I was pastor in Indonesia. I felt a lot of pressure but God has been faithful in helping me with this problem.

Being a woman pastor working with students who are much younger than me provides unique opportunities. A few of them have told me that I am like their mother with whom they can share their struggles. On one occasion, I went to the hospital to pray and wait with a young woman who was to deliver her first child. The nurse came out of the room with a smile and asked me, "Are you her mother? She has a baby girl."

When I was ordained, members of the neighboring Chinese Alliance church came to congratulate me. They were excited to see a woman pastor being ordained—the first one in the Chinese churches of



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Regina. I am also learning to work with colleagues from a different culture.

I thank God for giving me good co-workers, Terry and Karen Zimmerly, who have been a great help and encouragement to me in my process of learning and making adjustments. I have gone with them to pastors' conferences and with Karen to Saskatoon for women in ministry meetings almost every month. We gain support there.

Congolese Mennonite Brethren Conference ordains women pastors. In 2003, the Congolese Mennonite Brethren Conference took leadership in the International Committee of Mennonite Brethren, a group of about 20 national MB conferences, to be the first conference to ordain women. Rather than continue the old model in which churches outside of Canada and the United States follow the leadership of the Mennonite Brethren churches within the United States and Canada, the Congolese have discerned the biblical texts in their own context and have made the move to ordain women. Currently, two women are ordained in this conference. In the summer of 2003, the women's group of the MB District of Kikwit, Democratic Republic of Congo, said, "We thank the church of the Democratic Republic of Congo for having accepted the ordination of female pastors. In light of this decision, we propose that the Church of America and of Canada follow this example." *Jeanine Yoder and Mary Anne Isaak, "Congo MBs' ordination of women shows change in how churches relate," Mennonite Weekly Review, November 23, 2003.*

Lucille Marr was licensed at Mennonite Fellowship of Montreal, Quebec, in November 2003. She co-pastors with her husband Jean-Jacques Goulet. Lucille is also a professional associate and lecturer in the Faculty of Religious Studies at McGill University. She recently wrote *The Transforming Power of a Century: Mennonite Central Committee and Its Evolution in Ontario*; which is a history of MCC Ontario published by Pandora Press.

Susan E. Janzen recently became pastor of Cedar Falls Mennonite Church, Cedar Falls, Iowa.

On July 11, Jane Roeschley was ordained as pastor of Mennonite Church of Normal, Illinois.

This ministry is a spiritual blessing to me, though it is a tough ministry. It has helped me to grow and draws me closer to God. It builds my faith in our awesome God. He has been gracious to me, He sustains me and is sensitive to my concern. He helped me to overcome a lot of difficulties. There are uncounted spontaneous answers to prayers and numberless miracles that happened throughout my ministry. God is so good, He is a faithful God. Amen. ♦

World AIDS Campaign 2004 focuses on women and girls. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to HIV infection and to the impact of AIDS (for example, increased caregiving responsibilities, loss of income from death or incapacitation of themselves or a family member, and decreased educational opportunities). For more information, visit www.unaids.org. This December 1, 2004, World AIDS day will focus on women and girls, and MCC is preparing resources in honor of this day. For more information, visit www.mcc.org/us/womensconcerns. Meanwhile, to learn more about AIDS from a Christian perspective, MCC has produced a packet called "Join Hands, Stop AIDS Toolkit." This free packet includes interactive resources and projects that can be used with youth groups and Sunday school classes, as well as worship planning materials, a DVD and posters. To borrow the kit in Canada, call toll-free 888-622-6337. In the United States, call toll-free 877-517-5673.

Amanda "Mandy" Yoder Schrock was licensed on February 29, 2004, at First Mennonite Church in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Cedra Washington met with designated church leaders for her oral doctrinal exam in May and has received her full ministerial license. She serves at the Harrisburg Brethren in Christ Church, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, as Associate Pastor of Evangelism and Outreach.

Laura Wiebe-Powell was recently credentialed for her counseling ministry at Kern Road Mennonite Church in South Bend, Indiana.

Vikki Pruitte-Sorrells was recently licensed at Lee Heights Community Church, Cleveland, Ohio.

This ministry is a spiritual blessing to me, though it is a tough ministry. It has helped me to grow and draws me closer to God. It builds my faith in our awesome God.



Women in church leadership



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WOMEN'S CONCERNS REPORT

Looking Forward

NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 2004
Celebrating Report

Regional peace gathering. Mark your calendars for October 28–30, 2004 to attend a regional peace gathering in Columbus, Ohio, at Columbus Mennonite Church and North Broadway United Methodist Church; this is co-sponsored by the Peace and Justice Support Network (PJSN) of Mennonite Church USA (MC USA). The keynote speaker is J. Daryl Byler, director of the MCC U.S. Washington Office. He will be speaking on the relationship between faith and the public arena. There will be numerous workshops on restorative justice, youth and the military, hospitality, peacemaking in the Middle East, speaking truth to power, interfaith peacemaking and more. For more information, check the PJSN Web site at peace.mennolink.org or contact Leo Hartshorn, MC USA Minister of Peace and Justice, at 717-399-8353 or leoh@mennonite.mission.net.

Women in Ministry and Leadership retreat. This event, planned by Brethren in Christ women, is open to women in ministry and leadership from any denomination. The

retreat will be held at Kenbrook Bible Camp, Lebanon, Pennsylvania, on March 14–16, 2005. The theme will be “Celebrating our stories.” Speakers will include Anne Marie Griffith, Malia Meiser, and Brenda Wagner; in addition, there will be nine workshops, special times of worship, sharing, prayer, and Holy Communion. For more information or to request a brochure, go to www.equalworth.net/ministry or contact the Rev. Janet M. Peifer at 717-259-5404; revjmp@equalworth.net; or 156 Lake Meade Dr., East Berlin, PA 17316.

Damascus and Beyond: Seeking Clearer Sight and a Bolder Spirit. This conference, to be held March 11–13, 2005 in Atlanta, Georgia, will celebrate the Damascus Road Anti-Racism Program's 10 years of educating and organizing within the church, and will envision future directions for anti-racism work. For more information, contact Phil Brubaker at 574-246-0812 or pkb@mccus.org.